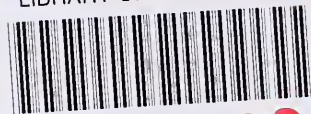


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from J. A. G.*

## REMARKS ON NONACOICUS,

THE INDIAN NAME OF MAJOR WILLARD'S FARM  
AT GROTON, MASS.

AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held May 11, 1893, Dr. SAMUEL A. <sup>bbott</sup>GREEN spoke as follows:—

In the library of the Historical Society there is a copy of a book, written in Latin by Joseph Acosta, and published at Cologne in the year 1596, which once belonged to Chief Justice Samuel Sewall, and bears his autograph signature, dated March 9, 1698-9. The volume is entitled "De Natvra Novi Orbis," etc., and has been in the possession of the Society for more than a century. On a fly-leaf, at the beginning of the book, is the following note in Judge Sewall's handwriting: "Nunnacôquis signifies an Indian Earthen Pot as Hañah Hahatan's Squaw tells me March, 24. 169<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>,"— which throws some light on the meaning of an Indian word. I mention the fact, as I am inclined to think that the term is identical with or closely allied to Nonacoicus, the Indian name of Major Simon Willard's farm at Groton. William Hahatan, Hannah's husband, belonged to the Ponkapoag tribe. His name is sometimes written Ahauton, Nahatan, and even Nahaughton.

As the spelling of all such words by the early settlers was phonetic, Nonacoicus has several different forms; and it is easy to see how the one may have been taken from the other, or from a similar form. Another variation of the word, as given in Sewall's Letter Book (I. 98), is "Nonna Coyacas"; and Noûajcoyicus, Nonecoicus, and Nonacoiacus are also found in old manuscripts.

In the original survey of the farm, returned by Thomas Noyes to the General Court at the session beginning on October 18, 1659, it is said that the land lies "at the place wch is Called by the Indians nanajcoyijcus." From this it would seem that the name was given to the neighborhood by the red men, and not by the whites. Perhaps earthen pots were made in that locality, as fragments of pottery, as well as various stone implements, were formerly found there and elsewhere throughout the township; and this fact may have given a distinctive name to the place.

Originally Nonacoicus included the district in Harvard now known as the Old Mill, — two miles away from Willard's farm, — where Jonas Prescott, of Groton, the grandfather of Colonel William Prescott, the American commander at Bunker Hill, had his grist-mill. John Prescott, of Lancaster, in his will, dated October 8, 1673, and on file in the Middlesex County Probate Office at East Cambridge, says in reference to his third son Jonas, named above, that "he hath Received a full Childs portion at nonecoicus in a Corne mill and Lands and other goods." After the death of Major Willard, Nonacoicus farm passed into the hands of Hezekiah Usher, and the deed speaks of the place as "Nonaicoicus farme"; and in Sewall's Diary there are many allusions both



to Usher and his wife. Usher's will is dated at Nonacoicus, on August 17, 1689. The judge himself was a member of the Third Church of Christ in Boston, now known as the "Old South," where he was a constant attendant on Sundays; and the minister at the time of the writing on the fly-leaf, was the Reverend Samuel Willard, a former preacher at Groton, and son of the first owner of the farm. All these circumstances, trivial in themselves, tend to show that the Indian name of the place was familiar to Sewall. The farm was situated on the banks of the Nashua River, in a neighborhood full of Indian traditions and associations. Major Willard's house was the first dwelling burned by the savages, when the town of Groton was destroyed in the spring of 1676.

My friend George J. Burns, Esq., a lawyer of Ayer, who has passed his whole life in the neighborhood of Nonacoicus, and is withal an accurate antiquary, thinks that the name was owing to the natural conformation of the land. The following letter, written by him in answer to one from me, gives a high degree of plausibility to his theory in the matter: —

AYER, MASS., May 10, 1893.

HON. SAMUEL A. GREEN,  
30 Tremont St., Boston: —

MY DEAR DR. GREEN, — Upon the west side of the Nashua River, near the mouth of Nonacoicus Brook, there is a very peculiar natural formation that could not have escaped the attention of the Indians; and it was of sufficient importance, both as a landmark, and as a post of observation commanding a view up and down the intervale, and rising above the floods that periodically inundate the surrounding lands, to have received a designation by them. While it is not alone the only "earthen pot" in this vicinity, it is just the kind of a formation to which such a name would be particularly applicable.



It consists of a promontory about 500 feet in length, varying from 300 to 500 feet in width, and protruding from the higher lands at the east in a succession of irregular ridges or small hills, which surround or enclose various hollows or basins, some of which contain water. During the last fifteen years I have often visited the place and wondered at its physical peculiarities, and I have tried to imagine what impression it made on the natives. I consider it the most interesting and curious natural feature of the territory called "Nonacoicus," and I am strongly of the opinion that it gave rise to the Indian name of this neighborhood.

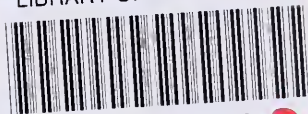
Yours truly,

GEO. J. BURNS.

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